

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** June 7, 2017

**Agenda Item:** Fleecer Wildlife Management Area Addition

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to purchase in fee title a 194-acre (approx.) parcel of private land adjacent to the Fleecer Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for the appraised value of \$620,000. The property is owned by the Margaret M. Noyce Revocable Trust. Funding for the acquisition would be a combination of Pittman-Robertson, Habitat Montana, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The property shares 2 miles of boundary with Fleecer WMA and is part of the Fleecer winter range that supports 700-900 elk and 150-200 antelope. The property also includes 2 miles of Divide Creek and 100 acres of associated wetland habitat that supports a trout fishery and year-round habitat for white-tailed deer. The wetland portion of the property is encumbered with a Wetland Reserve Program easement administered by the NRCS.

Seventy acres of irrigated tame grass hayfields are a part of the uplands. As part of the purchase agreement, the fields would continue to be managed by the current owner as irrigated meadows through a pilot 5-year irrigation/grazing lease. FWP anticipates that the lease arrangement, involving irrigation management and 120 AUMs of prescriptive grazing, would help keep the property attractive to elk and other wildlife, while also alleviating game damage issues on adjacent private lands. Services provided by the lessee would free up FWP staff from having to maintain the irrigation system and control weeds.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed action, which was released for public comment for 30 days (March 16-April 17, 2017). Legal notices were printed in the *Butte Montana Standard*, the *Anaconda Leader*, and the *Dillon Tribune*. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage. In addition, this proposal was discussed with many interested parties. Ten comments were received—8 supported the proposed action and 2 opposed it. The Decision Notice summarizes public comments.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Two alternatives were analyzed: FWP purchase this 194-acre parcel in fee-title, or not purchase it. If FWP were to pass on this opportunity, it is highly likely that the uplands portion of this property would eventually be developed, directly affecting big game winter range along two miles of WMA boundary.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission approve this acquisition. Purchasing this property will maintain and enhance the wildlife habitat values of Fleecer WMA, benefit fisheries, and help alleviate game damage on private lands. This acquisition would extend the WMA to a more suitable boundary (railroad and highway), preclude the potential for residential development on big game winter range, and provide additional public access for hunting, fishing, and other recreation.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission give final approval for acquiring this addition to the Fleecer WMA.